

Dear Friends,

During a recent sermon, I noted the stirring and stunning poem that 22-year-old Amanda Gorman wrote and read during last month's Presidential Inauguration. I wonder: Is it possible that the national youth poet laureate has inspired a new appreciation for poetry?

Some people find poetry to be rather inaccessible, incomprehensible, and esoteric. But isn't the inherent mystery of a poem part of its beauty? American essayist and poet Audre Lorde, who lived from February 18, 1934 - November 17, 1992, once wrote, "**Poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence.**"

Today is Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. Our virtual worship service is available here. As I say during the service, we are not distributing ashes this year, but we are giving you ashes in the form of a poem written by Jan Richardson. Rev. Richardson is an artist, writer, and a United Methodist minister.

Blessing the Dust
For Ash Wednesday

*All those days
you felt like dust,
like dirt,
as if all you had to do
was turn your face
toward the wind
and be scattered
to the four corners*

*or swept away
by the smallest breath
as insubstantial—*

*did you not know
what the Holy One
can do with dust?*

*This is the day
we freely say
we are scorched.*

*This is the hour
we are marked
by what has made it
through the burning.*

*This is the moment
we ask for the blessing
that lives within
the ancient ashes,
that makes its home
inside the soil of
this sacred earth.*

*So let us be marked
not for sorrow.
And let us be marked
not for shame.
Let us be marked
not for false humility
or for thinking
we are less
than we are*

*but for claiming
what God can do
within the dust,
within the dirt,
within the stuff
of which the world
is made
and the stars that blaze
in our bones
and the galaxies that spiral
inside the smudge
we bear.*

by Jan Richardson from *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons*
janrichardson.com

May the poem provide a fitting beginning for our Lenten journey. And may we all remember and lay claim to what our God can do.

Yours in Christ,
Jane